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SUBJECT: RUSSIA BLASTS GEORGIA IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

REF: GENEVA 727

Classified By: Ambassador Warren W. Tichenor. Reasons: 1.4 (B/D).

This is an action request, see para 5.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Russia's ambassador used the September 8 opening session of the Human Rights Council to criticize Georgia, which he accused of engaging in genocide. Georgia plans to respond on September 9, but to avoid getting into a retaliatory exchange, including charges and counter-charges, with Russia. The French ambassador, speaking on behalf of the EU presidency, said the EU would use Item 4 to speak on the Georgia crisis, adding that specific language had yet to be worked out but that the EU statement was likely to express general concern about human rights rather than criticize either Russia or Georgia. This cable requests guidance on whether to articulate the U.S. position on the Georgia crisis or remain silent in the face of the Russian statement. END SUMMARY.

RUSSIA LAMBASTES GEORGIA

12. (U) Russian Ambassador Valeriy Loshchinin used his country's response to new High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanathem Pillay's statement on human rights to sharply criticize Georgia. Mentioning the need to do all that is possible to stop genocide, the Russian statement condemned all who carry out acts of cleansing. It then turned directly to an attack on Georgia, "which bears responsibility for all these crimes against the South Ossetian people" and accuses Tbilisi of whipping up a disinformation campaign. Georgia's aim was "full scale ethnic cleansing and genocide, the gunning down of Russian citizens and peacekeepers." Russia acted based on its obligations under the Convention against Genocide, the statement concluded, since "only in that way could we have prevented the worst possible turn of events and a humanitarian catastrophe." Council President Martin Uhomoibhi allowed Loshchinin to conclude his statement, then said that comments during this segment of the session should focus on responding to the High Commissioner's statement.

13. (C) As we have noted (reftel), Georgia had been preparing to respond to Russia's criticism. We understand it plans to respond on September 9, but not to directly reply to the Russian intervention in order to avoid a tit-for-tat exchange.

EU PREPARED TO SPEAK

14. (C) In a luncheon hosted by the EU presidency, French Ambassador Jean-Baptiste Mattei told Ambassador Tichenor that the EU planned to make a statement on the Georgia crisis during discussion under Item 4 (human rights situations), which is currently slated to take place on September 15-16. According to Mattei, the details of the language have yet to be worked out, but it will likely be a "balanced" statement

expressing general concern about human rights violations in the crisis rather than criticizing either Russia or Georgia. Mattei said he had no indication whether individual EU members might also make national statements. (Comment: We have that as unlikely.) Both the Canadian and Australian delegations have told us they do not have plans at present to speak on the subject.

ACTION REQUEST

15. (C) There will be keen interest in whether the U.S. will voice our position on the Georgia crisis. In light of the Russian statement, to which Georgia is almost certain to respond, and given the plans of the EU and perhaps others to speak, Mission requests guidance on whether the U.S. should articulate our position in the Council on the Georgia crisis, presumably in Item 4 discussion, or to remain silent on the Russian statement.

TICHENOR